

## **Historic, Archive Document**

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.



#1207

DCB

# KEEPING PESTS FROM ENTERING THE COUNTRY

1  
Ag 84 Pro  
Cop. 3

DC BRANCH



U.S. DEPT. OF AGRICULTURE

# KEEPING PESTS FROM ENTERING THE COUNTRY

Every 12 minutes an enemy tries to run the U.S. border. Not a human enemy, but an agricultural pest that attacks plants or animals. Disease organisms, insects, nematodes, snails, and other pests hitchhike in the baggage of unsuspecting travelers. Or they hide in foreign fruits, vegetables, meats, plants, and souvenirs.

## A Continuous Challenge

The job of countering the continuous run on American borders by foreign insects falls to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). About 600 inspectors in USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) look for pests at over 80 U.S. ports of entry.

In 1976, about 280 million people entered the United States. Routine inspection of their luggage turned up a large number of hazardous items, including 380,000 forbidden plants and plant products and 240,000 pounds of forbidden meat and meat products. More than 10,000 significant pests were intercepted and destroyed.

## Even One Can Hurt

Few passengers see themselves as accessories to invasions of foreign pests if they bring in just one or two sausages, small pets, ornamental



plants, or pieces of fruit. Typically, they feel that, "My one little item can't hurt."

Unfortunately, this view is wrong. One item can easily introduce a highly destructive agricultural pest or disease.

In 1971, one or two parakeets from South America probably started an outbreak of exotic Newcastle disease that hit the San Bernardino Valley of southern California. It swept through chickens, turkeys, and fancy birds, sometimes wiping out an entire flock in a few days. State and Federal disease fighters aided by a military task force located 1,341 infected and exposed flocks with about 12 million birds, all of which had to be destroyed. Total cost of the operation: \$56 million.

In 1975, one or two mangoes from Hawaii or the Orient probably brought Mediterranean fruit flies to backyard fruit trees near Los Angeles. This invader attacks citrus and 200 other types of fruits and vegetables. A year-long cooperative eradication effort involved release of a half billion sterile fruit flies, which stopped natural reproduction by mating with invading fertile fruit flies. In addition, 740 baited traps were set and 6,555 fruit samples were collected and incubated to determine the extent of the problem. The infestation was limited to 12 properties, but eradication cost nearly a million dollars.

Virus-infected birds and fly-infested fruit can look perfectly harmless when purchased overseas. Parrots and parakeets can look amazingly healthy for quite some time despite being heavily infected. Fruit flies lay eggs just below the surface of fruit, leaving only a tiny puncture mark on the peel.

Quite obviously, even one can hurt.



## Explosive Damage

If pests are not stopped at the border or eradicated after they arrive, they rapidly can explode into large populations because pests usually arrive here without their natural enemies. Unrestricted by parasites and diseases, foreign pests ravage our food supply and spoil our environment. For example, European corn borers filched more than \$500 million from corn growers in 1975. And gypsy moths took the leaves off a million acres of forest in Pennsylvania alone in 1977.

In addition, pests cause losses and condemnation in the production of livestock and spoilage in the growing of fruit and vegetables. Pests also damage our lawns and gardens and ruin our playgrounds and parks by attacking grass, shrubs, flowers, and trees. Each year, agricultural pests in the United States run up costs totaling \$12 billion to control their spread and pay for their damage.







## Agricultural Baggage Inspection

To avoid such losses, passengers and their luggage and vehicles are inspected at four types of locations by APHIS, supported by the U.S. Customs Service.

First, at international airports, air cargo and passenger baggage is inspected. The airplanes themselves are examined for food and plants left behind in galleys, passenger seats, and overhead racks.

Second, at seaports, all ships from overseas get an agricultural inspection of galleys, stores, and passenger compartments, as soon as they arrive. Any cargo and passenger baggage unloaded also is inspected.

Third, at the Mexican border, incoming cars, trucks, railroad cars, and other vehicles are checked for hitchhiking pests. Inspectors also check drivers, passengers, baggage, and cargo, plus millions of pedestrians who cross the border to the United States.

And fourth, in Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Bahama, and Bermuda, baggage of air travelers is inspected before they depart to the U.S. mainland.





## **Travelers' Cooperation Needed**

Even with extensive inspection, some pests still can slip into the country. So the Government asks travelers to cooperate by leaving harmful agricultural items behind and by bringing back only items approved for entry.

The handy APHIS booklet, "Travelers' Tips," lists food, plant, and animal products that are approved for import. For a free copy, write to: Travelers' Tips, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D.C. 20250.

Plant Protection and Quarantine Programs  
Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service



